

Restoration for Wildlife

LIP and the Gary Bagely Property

Gary Bagely owns about 300 acres of North Platte Valley riverfront property. This area consists of wetland, slough and wet meadow habitats, which provide critical environments to "at-risk" bird species for breeding, feeding and migratory stopovers. The objective of this project is to restore diverse wetland habitat to provide for at-risk species, which include migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, cranes, wading birds, Sandhill Cranes, and other "at-risk" wildlife.

The Problem

Over the last 30 years, there has been an increasing loss of wetland habitats due to invading populations of Russian olive, eastern red cedar, *Phragmites* and cattail, construction of dams along the river, and a change in natural annual river flow. This part of the river historically flooded periodically which maintained and created these natural habitats of wetland, slough and wet meadows.



A cleared island along the North Platte River as part of Gary Bagely's project

Unfortunately for wildlife, this river now functions as a canal, with high water levels during the summer months and low levels during the rest of the year, which is backwards from the natural flows. In an effort to restore the natural diversity that once inhabited this land, Bagely entered into a 5-year Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) agreement with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. "He wanted to do things for wildlife, to return something back to nature," says NGPC biologist TJ Walker.

The Approach

Approximately 4,500 linear feet of off-channel aquatic habitat was restored and created by excavation of former side-channels of the North Platte River.



Areas of cleared vegetation along the channels that have been covered with sand. This area will be seeded in the spring.

Over 14,400 cubic yards of materials were excavated along these channels creating areas of variable depths, with primarily shallow-water habitats formed. The removed

sand, silt and other materials were spread out on the higher elevation areas around old channels to keep the area looking as natural as possible. Also, 26 acres of accretion ground and islands were cleared of trees, shrubs and other undesirable vegetation. This provided larger openings along the river channel, which improves the habitat conditions for migratory birds. The cut woody vegetation was piled and burned, and the remaining debris was buried on the site. Twenty acres of the restored slough will be reseeded with native sandy/wetland prairie mix, while the rest will be left to reseed naturally.



Sandhill Cranes near or in the Platte River, Kearney, NE

The Outcome

"I think this will have multiple benefits for a lot of species," states Walker. "This is really just the beginning; this will become a good wetland site." Walker anticipates seeing ducks stopping over here next season and hopes to see Sandhill Cranes coming back to roost in this area. Bagley agrees to maintain

the site through approved grazing management, prescribed fire and protection from unauthorized activities.



One of several side channels created to add diverse habitat for wetland wildlife

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